



Healthy snack tips or light meals

Collected and Created by Eve Lees, [Nutrition Coach](#)

Many of us are filling up on foods that offer few nutrients for the calories they provide. These foods are also called processed, refined foods or “junk food.” Without the nutrients needed to sustain life, the body can’t function properly. Neither can the brain. We’re seeing a rise in obesity, heart disease, diabetes, depression and chronic fatigue. We are plagued with a *malnourishment* epidemic.

Take steps to improve your diet. Stock up for more healthful meals and quick snacks for all ages – at home, school, work, or on the road. The following suggestions need only a little preparation. Keep an insulated lunch bag and perhaps a few small ice packs handy in your freezer, should you need your snacks and meals “take out.”

1. Dates and figs are a naturally sweet and nutrition-loaded alternate to candy. Keep some handy in the refrigerator.
2. Unsalted, natural pistachios or other nuts can be left for a few days on the coffee table as well. Nuts provide the nutritious "good" for you fats (needed for brain development and functioning). However, it's best to keep raw, unsalted nuts in the refrigerator or freezer to prevent rancidity. Put them in a container that's easy to get at. And always practice moderation; have only a small handful of nuts once or twice a day.
3. Peanut allergies? There are many other nut butters available. Shop around for cashew, almond or hazelnut spreads. Most health stores or supermarket health sections carry them. Caution – any nut butter must be refrigerated after opening. If stored in the cupboard for more than a few days, they won't be safe to consume!
4. Cook several chicken breasts. Slice in 3 to 4oz serving sizes and freeze. Pack one serving in a lunch, frozen. By lunchtime, it'll be thawed to eat.
5. Keep hard-boiled eggs in the refrigerator for a quick snack.
6. Prepare cup-up vegetables twice a week, and store them in the fridge. If you must have a dip, try plain yogurt or low-fat sour cream seasoned with a few herbs and spices, or use salsa. Salsa makes a tasty dip, salad dressing or topping for any food. It's just vegetables with lots of nutrients and little fat. However, read the ingredient label before buying, as some salsa makers unfortunately add sugar to their product.



7. Sliced vegetables prepared ahead of time also make convenient on-the-go snacks. They can be taken to work, etc., in a Tupperware container or zip-lock sandwich bag. Refrigeration isn't needed unless you won't be eating them right away. If that's the case, just keep the vegetable whole (don't slice it up). Good choices for whole veggies (just rinse and eat) are the small pickling cucumbers, baby zucchinis, baby carrots, celery sticks, or cherry tomatoes. They are all low in calories and fat, but high in fibre and carbs (for energy). You can choose to have a handful of nuts with this snack; the essential fats in the nuts will keep your hunger away longer. And here are more on-the-go snack ideas, some that do not need refrigeration . . .



Choose fresh fruit, like an apple, with a handful of raw nuts or a protein source like a hard-boiled egg. The complex carbs of the fruit help keep your energy levels up, while the protein and healthy fats in the nuts or eggs helps buffer any blood sugar increases fruit sugar may cause.

Be original – grab a *whole* vegetable as a quick snack, instead of fruit. A whole bell pepper (eat it like an apple), a firm whole tomato, or a chayote squash (it looks like a pear).

These whole vegetables shouldn't seem strange to snack on, without having to cut them up first!



8. Keep fresh fruit like apples, oranges, and bananas in baskets on the coffee table or kitchen counter, and in the refrigerator for snacks on the run (better than having a chocolate bar). Stock a variety of fruit, like pears, grapefruit, kiwi, star fruit, fresh strawberries, etc.
9. Canned legumes like garbanzo beans (chickpeas), kidney beans or other large beans are tasty finger foods. Rinse them well and store in the fridge for easy access. Canned legumes are precooked; there's no need to heat them before eating. Just be sure to rinse them well to reduce the added salt.
10. Bake several potatoes or sweet potatoes and store them in the fridge to eat cold (or reheat them). A great slow-digesting carb for any time! When you slice them in half, they can replace "bread" slices. Stuff sliced meat, eggs and veggies in between the 'bread' for a healthier 'sandwich'.
11. Tuna or egg salad 'sandwich' spreads: Instead of using mayonnaise, mix tuna with mashed avocado or use low-fat plain yogurt. Add diced apples and raisins. Mix hard-boiled eggs with either avocado or the low-fat yogurt, as well as grated carrots, diced green peppers and celery. Use as a filling, wrapped in lettuce leaves or swiss chard or stuff it into a baked potato or sweet potato.
12. Your tuna filling above can be also stuffed into the following "wrap" recipe: Whisk one whole egg (or two egg whites; about ¼ cup) in a small bowl. Next, whisk in about 1 to 1.5 tablespoons of ground chia seed or ground flax seed. Add seasonings, if you prefer. Put a small drop of olive oil on a dinner-sized plate. Spread the oil around the bottom of the plate. Pour the egg "batter" on the plate (it'll be a little runny), and tilt the plate in a circular motion to make the batter fill the bottom of the plate evenly. Microwave for about 2.5 minutes. Let cool before rolling up with veggies or the tuna filling above. Unfortunately, heating the ground-up seeds may lower its nutrient content, but it still offers fibre benefits. If you'd rather not use a microwave, use the oven and a lightly oiled pie tin. Bake at 175°C (350°F) for about 5 minutes.

13. And here's my favourite creation which I thought of back in the 1980's when I was first getting rid of the "bread" in my diet (I should have trademarked this!). Slice the solid end of a butternut squash (see picture at right) into thin slices, and toast them in the toaster. You can use these as your bread slices if you *really need* to have the feel of holding a sandwich.



14. Instead of margarine, use avocado or olive oil as a spread on your 'fake bread' slices or in the 'wraps' I previously described. Store olive oil in a wide-mouthed container in the fridge (easier to get your knife into). When cold, the oil congeals and becomes easy to spread. Avocado is another spread option. Avocados can be stored in a sealed bag in the fridge to slow ripening. Once you've sliced an avocado, store it in a tightly-sealed container in the fridge. Put several slices of raw onion in the container to slow the browning.

15. Avoid the fruit-filled yogurts. Buy plain and mix in your own fresh fruit. You don't need the processed sugars in the commercially-prepared yogurts!

16. Mix $\frac{1}{2}$ cup frozen blueberries into a $\frac{1}{4}$ cup (or less) of plain yogurt. It becomes a refreshing, delicious frozen treat. Sprinkle ground nuts or flax meal on top.

17. Frozen grapes or frozen (unsweetened) strawberries are a quick, cool snack at home, especially on a hot day. Frozen peas or corn are other refreshing treats!

18. Frozen yogurt popsicles are another treat for kids (or yourself); Mix 1 cup plain yogurt with a soft, mashed up fruit, like raspberries or blueberries. Add drops of alcohol-free vanilla if desired. Pour into popsicle molds and freeze.

19. Instead of soda pop, keep a pitcher of lemon water in the refrigerator. Slice $\frac{1}{4}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$ lemon and squeeze the slices into the water. Leave a few slices floating to enhance the lemony taste. This "lemonade" is refreshing and really doesn't need sweetener. In addition, the vitamin C from the lemon helps dissipate any [chlorine](#) in the water.



Eve Lees is a [Certified Nutrition Coach](#), as well as a [Health Speaker and Health Columnist](#) for several publications.